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AUTHOR Kim, Sei-Hill
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ABSTRACT

This study looks at individuals' opinion expressions as a rational behavior based on a conscious calculus of expected benefits and costs (economic analysis). The influences of "issue benefit," "opinion congruence," and "issue knowledge," as sources of benefits and costs on opinion expression were hypothesized and tested. The study also examined the interaction effects of those factors and the types of opinion expression. For the tests, 171 university students were surveyed in 1997 regarding their willingness to express opinions on the issue of "doctor-assisted suicide." Results indicated that the amount of issue benefit expected by students was related to their willingness to express opinions; the level of students' perception of their own issue knowledge was influential on their opinion expressions; and students' own judgments about the possible consequences of a given issue might function, against fear of isolation, as a motivating factor of opinion expression. (Contains 34 references and a table of data.) (RS)

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OPINION EXPRESSION AS A RATIONAL BEHAVIOR

By Sei-Hill Kim

Graduate Student
Department of Communication
Cornell University

2250 N. Triphammer Rd. #R3F
Ithaca, NY 14850
Tel: (607) 266-9477
email: sk143@cornell.edu

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ABSTRACT

This study understands individuals' opinion expressions as a rational behavior based on a conscious calculus of expected benefits and costs. The influences of "issue benefit"; "opinion congruence"; and "issue knowledge", as sources of benefits and costs, on opinion expression w .re hypothesized and tested. This study also examined the interaction effects of those factors and the types of opinion expression. For the tests, 171 university students were surveyed in 1997 regarding their willingness to express opinions on the issue of "doctor-assisted suicide."

Opinion Expression as a Rational Behavior

The great importance of public opinion stems from its ability to influence policies as a type of common people's censor of government in a democratic system. To reach policy makers' attention, individual sentiments and opinions should be expressed in certain ways (Blumer 1948). Keeping silence does not mean "neutral" nor "no" opinion, but instead is regarded as a "consent" - sometimes, a coerced one: "... throughout history, silence has been regarded as assent - in this case assent to the system." (Alinsky 1971, xzx) In a realistic sense public opinion represents, at least in the viewpoint of policy makers, the opinion of those who have interests and resources enough to actively and effectively raise their voices (Verba 1996).

Political decision making can be understood, in part, as a product of competitions and compromises among the groups holding conflicting values and interests from what is done about a given issue (Blumer 1971). Those groups, such as "pros" and "cons", enter the political process of public consent to mediate or modulate the process in the direction of maximizing their values and interests, expressing opinions through such activities as voting, demonstration, petition, writing letters to congressmen, and so on. When an opinion is supported by those activities which are significant in numbers and consolidated strongly enough to be recognized as a prevalent one, the opinion becomes a "public" opinion, influencing political decision making in a democratic social system (Bernard 1926, Best 1973). Taking this conceptualization of public opinion, individuals' opinion expressions should be understood as an active participation in a collective behavior intended to translate their collective interests into public policy, rather than as simply answering a question of what is right and wrong.

The present study identifies several factors determining individuals' willingness to express their opinions. The relative weights of those factors in predicting opinion

expression will be compared across various types of opinion expression required in particular situations. It is assumed, for this study, that members of the public are rational entities who consciously calculate the benefits and costs of their behaviors when they decide whether to behave. Therefore, an opinion expression would be an outcome of the conscious calculation of how much individuals can gain or lose from their social behaviors - in this case, "opinion expression." Only when the sum of benefits exceeds expected costs of opinion expression, will individuals be willing to express their opinions (Taylor 1982).

The framework of economic analysis has been adopted in explaining such political participation as voting (e.g., Downs 1957; Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Aldrich 1993) and collective action in general (e.g., Buchanan and Tullock 1962; Olson 1965; Popkin 1979; Elster 1985). The present study adopts this conceptual device to account for not only such direct political action as participating in a "demonstration" but also the micro side of participation, like engaging in a "discussion" or accepting to be "interviewed by TV reporter." Katz emphasized the importance of conversation and debate surrounding public issues as the most important building block for participatory democracy: "Conversation is the crucible in which opinion is tested and shaped; it is the rehearsal hall for political action." (1995, xxx) Expressing opinions through mass media also is one of the most visible types of expression from which the public observes opinion climates (Noelle-Neumann 1973).

The present study will investigate "issue benefit"; "opinion congruence with other people"; and "issue knowledge" as factors influencing opinion expression. One of the main concerns of this study is to examine, under the framework of economic analysis, which factors are at work or can be safely ignored as the sources of benefits or costs in determining willingness to express one's opinion in particular situations.

CALCULUS OF BENEFITS AND COSTS OF OPINION EXPRESSION

Issue Benefit

Issue benefit represents a utility perceived to be given to individuals when their claims are adopted as a government policy, and successfully achieves their collective interests such as "pollution-free environment", "employment", "adequate health care", "equal opportunities for minorities", and so on. The more an issue is perceived to be consequential to individuals' values and interests, the more actively those individuals will express their opinions. As Gergen (1968, 193) noted, "The greater the impact, the more people who will be seeking active engagement in the decision making." Therefore, the amount of expected issue benefit can be assumed to be related to individuals' willingness to express their opinions.

In saying "neither support nor oppose" an issue, individuals may indicate that they don't expect any benefit from what is done about the issue. In many cases, however, individuals' opinion positions might be somewhat ambivalent. That is, individuals may expect benefits not just from one opinion position but from several - even from conflicting ones. In this case, individuals perceive relatively little amount of actual issue benefit because achieving one benefit may result in losing the other which is also beneficial - a zero-sum situation. In other words, the actual amount of issue benefit from an opinion position is offset by that of conflicting opinions. For instance, electorates usually show higher voting turnout when they perceive a great party differential than they do when there is not much significant difference in the policies proposed by competing parties (Downs 1957).

The concept of issue benefit in this study is not limited to the narrow sense of one's own material utility or selfishness. Instead, it includes such abstract and broad social benefits as "social justice" and "morality" which may not have a direct nor immediate

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impact on one's own personal interests. As Scott (1976; 1977) has noted, the narrow sense of individual rationality fails in explaining reckless behaviors of indignant crowds who resist, despite any possible risk and cost, against unjust authority. The present study regards those social benefits, as well as personal benefits, as motivating factors of opinion expression, despite its underlying assumption of self-interested human behavior. As Downs (1957) has noted, self-denying charity, feeling of moral satisfaction, and keeping social justice are sometimes great sources of benefits to individuals.

The actual amount of issue benefit should be understood in the relation with "self-efficacy": a perception of how big differences an individual's opinion expression can make in political decision making on a given issue. Suppose individuals believe it is very unlikely that their opinions would be adopted as a policy, despite their political participation - in this case, "opinion expression." For those individuals, there is no difference in utility whether they participate or abstain because in both cases actually no benefit will be given to them. That is, the additional utility produced by participation equals to zero. In this case of low self-efficacy, accordingly, issue benefit does not function as a motivating factor of opinion expression, no matter how large it is. On the other hand, suppose individuals believe success is so assured that their opinions would be adopted as a government policy even without their participation. Because the character. ic of "public good" of issue benefit does not exclude non-participants from its utility, the utility of issue benefit is given to non-participants as well as participants, despite their abstention. In this case of another low self-efficacy, like in the previous one, opinion expression does not produce any additional utility. Accordingly issue benefit does not function as a motivating factor of opinion expression.

However, as the importance of an individual's opinion expression increases to such an extent that it may make a difference in political decision making, issue benefit does begin to

function as a motivating factor because whether to participate or abstain may result in a big difference in expected utility. For instance, relatively high voting turnout in a close election can be explained by the public's perception of increased importance of one vote (Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Therefore the effect of issue benefit, in determining willingness to express one's opinion, seems to be contingent upon the level of self-efficacy. The importance of self-efficacy as a motivating factor has been reported in explaining political outspokenness (Lasorsa 1991) and political participation in general (Gamson 1992; Benford 1993). Under the framework of economic analysis, the present study considers self-efficacy as a contingent factor of the effect of issue benefit.

Procedural Costs and Rewards

Due to the characteristic of public good, issue benefit does not exclude non-participants from its utility. It also should be noted that the utility of issue benefit becomes feasible only after an opinion is successfully adopted as a policy. However, the following factors, "procedural costs and rewards", are given exclusively to those who actually express their opinions. Furthermore, they are produced in the process of opinion expression, and have nothing to do with what is done about the issue of interest.

Procedural costs include personal resources required to express one's opinion. In the case of voting, for instance, it costs time, energy, and perhaps financial expenses for electorates to register themselves and actually to go to the polls. If individuals decide not to express their opinions, they do not have to pay the costs, and may utilize those resources for other more private purposes. Therefore, procedural cost functions as a deterrent factor of opinion expression, diluting the effect of issue benefit in calculation.

On the other hand, procedural rewards represent whatever benefits produced in the process of opinion expression. For those with low self-efficacy, as noted earlier, issue benefit does not function as an incentive of opinion expression. Some additional benefits, given exclusively to participants, are required to make them participate in a collective effort: "... unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests." (Olson 1965, 2) Health insurance for the members of labor union is an example of those rewards. The present study is concerned with "opinion congruence with other people" and "issue knowledge" as sources of procedural costs and rewards of opinion expression. Those costs and rewards are psychological rather than material in nature.

Opinion Congruence. Noelle-Neumann's theory of spiral of silence (1973; 1974; 1977; 1985) has emphasized the psychological concept of "fear of isolation" as a micro basis of macro phenomenon, that is the process of public opinion formation. Due to the intrinsic fear of being isolated from other people, the theory argues, individuals scan their opinion climate - mainly from mass media - to assess which opinion is a prevalent one. If individuals find their opinions are dominant or gaining supports, they speak up with confidence. On the other hand, the same individuals keep silent if they perceive their opinions are in the minority or losing ground. This difference of outspokenness results in a spiraling process where one opinion dominates public scene as "public" opinion, repressing other opinions, which subsequently disappear from public discourse.

Fear of isolation, the central element of spiral of silence theory, can be understood as a psychological cost imposed to those who express unpopular opinions. The perception of opinion congruence with other people, on the other hand, can be thought of as a source of procedural reward. Even when individuals do not expect any benefit from a given issue,

simply expressing an opinion which is shared by other people may provide them with such psychological benefit as securing "collective identity" with other people, encouraging them to express the opinion.

Issue Knowledge. The level of knowledge on a given issue can be considered to be a source of procedural costs and rewards of opinion expression. As Salmon and Neuwirth (1990) have noted, engaging in social discourse requires one to be familiar with public affairs. Therefore, when individuals lack knowledge to articulate their opinions, they may fear "appearing ignorant" or "being humiliated" as they cannot logically rebut opponent's retort in a debate. The risk of being considered ignorant or humiliated can be regarded as a psychological cost imposed upon those who are not familiar with a given issue. In contrast, those who possess high level of knowledge may expect such benefits as "feeling of self-esteem" or "appearing politically efficacious" by demonstrating their knowledge about public issues. The level of issue knowledge can be assumed to be positively related with the willingness to express one's opinion.

Types of Opinion Expression

In addition to identifying the factors determining individuals' willingness to express their opinions, the present study is concerned with how the relative weights of the factors, in predicting opinion expression, will vary with the types of opinion expression. Various types of opinion expression are distinguishable in terms of intrinsic costs they require. While donating money, for instance, requires some financial resources, participating in a demonstration usually costs time or risk (e.g., risk to be arrested). Different types of political participation may also vary in terms of their visibility and impression on policy

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makers and accordingly their potential to prompt a system level response (Verba and Nie 1972).

Paying attention to the effect of opinion congruence, the present study is concerned with the probability that an opinion expression is exposed to other people or to cause a unpleasant (or hostile) responses. As Salmon and Oshagan (1990) have noted, various types of opinion expressions can be distinguished in terms of the degree to which they are public and the feedback will be hostile. If a type of opinion expression is not so much conspicuous nor obtrusive, it is not necessary to include such cost and reward as fear of isolation or securing collective identity into the calculus of opinion expression. In this perspective, it can be assumed that the effect of opinion congruence will be more significant in the situation of conspicuous types of opinion expression.

HYPOTHESES

The present study tests five hypotheses. The first two hypotheses test the effect of issue benefit and an interaction effect of issue benefit and self-efficacy on individuals' willingness to express opinions. The third and fourth hypotheses test the effects of opinion congruence and issue knowledge on opinion expression. The fifth hypothesis examines how opinion congruence interacts with the types of opinion expression in influencing opinion expression.

H1: Greater issue benefit expected by individuals will be associated with the increased willingness to express their opinions.

H2: The effect of issue benefit on opinion expression will be contingent upon the level of self-efficacy.

H3: Greater opinion congruence with other people perceived by individuals will be associated with the increased willingness to express their opinions.

H4: Greater issue knowledge possessed by individuals will be associated with the increased willingness to express their opinions.

H5: The effect of opinion congruence on opinion expression will be greater in the situation of conspicuous types of opinion expression than in less conspicuous types.

METHOD

On April 21, 1997, 171 university students were surveyed regarding their willingness to express opinions on the issue of "doctor-assisted suicide." The student subjects were recruited from an intro-factory advertising class at Michigan State University. In the class, subjects were informed about the purpose of the survey and extra credit for their participation. It was ensured that participation in the survey would be completely anonymous and voluntary. Then survey questionnaires were distributed to the subjects, and their responses were collected. Among the responses, 15 were excluded as incomplete or unreliable responses. Finally, 156 responses were used for data analysis.

The previous studies (e.g., Noelle-Neumann 1974; Salmon and Neuwirth 1990; Lasorsa 1991) found that level of "education" was positively associated with individuals' overall willingness to express opinions. Due to the use of college student sample in this study, it is likely that overall willingness to express opinion was inevitably overestimated. However, the results regarding the comparison of relative weights of factors in the various

settings of opinion expression can be generalized in an ordinal perspective without serious limitation. Above all, the use of student sample inevitably limits the generalization of the findings of this study. Therefore, in understanding the effects of the hypothesized factors on opinion expression, it should be kept in mind that the student sample does not perfectly represent a general population.

Measurement

Opinion Expression. Subjects' willingness to express opinions was measured in three types of opinion expression: participating in a political "demonstration"; engaging in a "discussion"; and accepting "to be interviewed by TV reporter." Subjects were asked how likely they would (a) participate in a demonstration with other people who held the same opinion as their own; (b) participate in a discussion with other people on given issue; and (c) be interviewed by TV reporter and express opinions. Responses were scored on a scale of 1 ("not likely at all") to 7 ("very likely").

Those three types of opinion expression can be distinguished conceptually in terms of their confidentiality and the probability of hostile feedback. Expressing an opinion to a TV interview can be regarded as the most conspicuous form of opinion expression - low confidentiality. Participating in a demonstration can be considered to result in the most hostile feedback from other people. On the other hands, participating in a discussion can be characterized by its relatively high confidentiality and low probability of hostile feedback.

Issue Benefit. Issue benefit was measured in two types, "social" and "personal" benefits. Respondents were asked whether they believed the legalization of doctor-assisted suicide would be a benefit or loss (or damage) to their society (social benefit) and themselves (personal benefit). In each case of social and personal benefits, responses were

scored on a 7-point scale in which each end anchored "great benefit" and "serious loss (or damage)." The "neutral" answer was located on center. A '0' was given to the respondents who answered "neutral", while a '+3' and '-3' was given respectively to those who expected "a great benefit" and "a great loss (damage)." The absolute value of the sum of social and personal benefit scores was used as the amount of issue benefit subjects were expecting (Issue Benefit = |Social Benefit + Personal Benefit|). Therefore, a high value means a great amount of issue benefit from either "legalizing" or "banning" doctor-assisted suicide, while low value represents three possible cases in which respondents expect a certain benefit from neither legalizing nor banning the practice; perceive a benefit from both cases - an ambivalent situation; or recognize a conflict between their social and personal benefits.

The level of self-efficacy was measured by asking respondents whether they believed their opinion expressions on given issue were very important if their opinion positions were to be adopted as a policy by the state of Michigan. Responses were scored on a 7-point scale in which '1' represented "strongly disagree", and '7' corresponded to 'strongly agree." The mean value of self-efficacy (m=4.36) was used to divide the groups of high and low self-efficacy. An interaction term, combining issue benefit and self-efficacy, was formed by multiplying the measure of issue benefit by the level of self-efficacy.

Opinion Congruence. In regard to the perception of others' opinions, previous studies (e.g., Glynn 1989, Salmon and Neuwirth 1990, Salmon and Oshagan 1990) have found that individuals actually did and were able to estimate the differences in various opinion climates. This finding suggests that individuals not only perceive the opinion of the public as a whole, but also do estimate the opinions of respective social groups when they assess others' opinions. Therefore, the level of opinion congruence was measured in two different opinion climates: (a) people in the state of Michigan and (b) subjects' own friends.

People in Michigan represent an anonymous general public, while subjects' own friends stand for a reference group. Respondents were asked whether they thought most of those others held the same opinion as their own. Then, the responses were scored on a 7-point scale (1="strongly disagree"; 7="strongly agree").

Issue Knowledge. The measurement of issue knowledge did not intend to examine the accuracy of respondents' knowledge on given issue. That is because it is not the actual accuracy of knowledge, but the individuals' subjective judgment of whether or not they have sufficient knowledge on a given issue that may function as a source of procedural cost or reward of opinion expression. Furthermore, subjects' knowledge can be a highly biased one which has been selectively collected in accordance with their own opinion positions. Therefore, the level of issue knowledge was measured by simply asking respondents, on a 7-point scale (1="strongly disagree"; 7="strongly agree"), whether they had clear knowledge on given issue.

RESULTS

Three separate multiple regressions were conducted which accounted for the shared contribution of independent variables in predicting subjects' willingness to (a) participate in a demonstration; (b) engage in a discussion; and (3) accept to be interviewed by TV reporter. Because gender and political interest have been found to be influential on individuals' willingness to express opinions (Noelle-Neumann 1974; 1984), those two "personal characteristic" variables entered each regression model first. Then the

"procedural costs and rewards" variables (issue knowledge, opinion congruence with Michigan residents, and opinion congruence with subjects' own friends) entered each model. For a more stringent test of their effects, self-efficacy and issue benefit entered the model after all personal characteristic and procedural costs/rewards variables had explained the variance of dependent variable. Finally the interaction term, combining the effects of issue benefit and self-efficacy, entered the model.

When the interaction term (issue benefit * self-efficacy) entered the model, its contribution was not significant in explaining any type of opinion expression. So the interaction term was excluded from each model. Finally a parsimony model, containing gender, political interest, issue knowledge, opinion congruence with Michigan residents and friends, self-efficacy, and issue benefit, was selected to examine the effects of hypothesized factors on individuals' willingness to express opinions, and to compare the relative weights of those factors in determining opinion expression (see table 1).

The first hypothesis assumes a positive relationship between issue benefit and the willingness to express opinion. As can be seen in table 1, the relationship between issue benefit and opinion expression is significant in all three types of opinion expression: participating in a demonstration ($\beta = .182$, $p<.05$); engaging in a discussion ($\beta = .164$, $p<.05$); and accepting to be interviewed by TV reporter ($\beta = .176$, $p<.01$).

The second hypothesis postulates that the effect of issue benefit on opinion expression will be contingent upon the level of self-efficacy. As noted earlier, the interaction term was not significant in explaining opinion expression when it entered regression model with other dependent variables. The second hypothesis was not supported in this study.

Table 1. Multiple Regressions Predicting Willingness to Express Opinions

Variables	Willingness to Participate in Demonstration (N=154[a])		Willingness to Participate in Discussion (N=153[b])		Willingness to Accept TV Interview (N=154[c])	
	β	R-square change	β	R-square change	β	R-square change
Personal Characteristics		.016		.089**		.020
Gender (female=1)	.078		.094		.031	
Political Interest[d]	.081		.212**		.071	
Procedural Costs and Rewards		.086**		.086**		.137***
Issue Knowledge	.011		.195*		.171*	
(Opinion Congruence with…)						
Michigan Residents	-.043		-.144		-.104	
Friends	.250**		.155		.261**	
Issue Benefit		.075**		.033*		.055**
Self-Efficacy (high=1)[e]	.190*		.067		.142	
Issue Benefit	.182*		.164*		.176*	
Total R-square		.176***		.208***		.212***

Note: Significance of regression coefficients (β) was evaluated with t-test.

[a] [b] [c] The initial sample size was 156. The decreases of the number of cases are attributed to missing responses.

[d] Level of political interest was measured by asking respondents, on a 7- point scale (1= "very little"; 7="very much"), "In general, how interested are you in social affairs, such as public issues?"

[e] The mean value of self-efficacy (m=4.36) was used to divide the groups of high and low self-efficacy.

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

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The third hypothesis tests one of the central postulates of Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence theory - a positive relationship between the level of opinion congruence and willingness to express opinions. The hypothesis was supported in the case of opinion congruence with friends. The subjects' willing to express opinions through demonstration and TV interview is, as shown in table 1, significantly associated with the level of opinion congruence with friends: $\beta = .250$, $p<.01$ for demonstration; $\beta = .261$, $p<.01$ for TV interview. However, the effect of opinion congruence with friends on subjects' willingness to participate in a discussion is not significant. The association between opinion congruence with Michigan residents and opinion expression is not significant in all types of opinion expression. Furthermore the associations are, though not significant, all negative rather than positive.

As expected in the fourth hypothesis, the level of issue knowledge was found to be positively related with the subjects' willingness to express opinions. Table 1 indicates that subjects are more likely to engage in a discussion ($\beta = .195$, $p<.05$) and to express their opinions through TV interview ($\beta = .171$, $p<.05$) when they believe they have a clear knowledge on given issue. However, the level of issue knowledge is not significantly associated with the subjects' willingness to participate in a demonstration.

The fifth hypothesis examines how the effect of opinion congruence varies with the types of opinion expression. As found in testing the third hypothesis (a positive relationship between opinion congruence and opinion expression), the level of opinion congruence with friends was significantly associated with the willingness to participate in a demonstration and in a TV interview, which can be considered as relatively conspicuous types of opinion expression. Meanwhile, the opinion congruence with friends is not significantly associated with the willingness to participate in a discussion, which can be

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regarded as a relatively confidential type of opinion expression (see table 1). These results may support the fourth hypothesis assuming greater effect of opinion congruence in conspicuous types of opinion expression than in confidential ways.

DISCUSSION

The amount of issue benefit expected by subjects was found to be related to their willingness to express opinions. This result may suggest that individuals are more likely to engage in opinion expression when they perceive an issue is consequential to their values and interests. If individuals do not expect any benefit from what is done about a given issue, it is likely that their willingness to express opinions is mostly dependent upon such procedural cost as fear of isolation. However, if individuals perceive such a significant amount of issue benefit that it overwhelms negative sanction of fear of isolation, they would be willing to express their opinions even though they are holding minority opinions. That is, individuals who perceive a given issue to be consequential to themselves may not be sensitive to its opinion climate. Previous studies have supported this speculation. Salmon and Oshagan (1990) found that the impact of perceived opinion congruence was much greater on less involving issues than on more involving or personal issues. Willnat (1996) also found that the effect of perceptions of opinion congruence on subjects' political outspokenness was contingent upon their perception of issue importance.

Noelle-Neumann ignores the effect of issue benefit ("positive sanction") on opinion expression. She notes that "... positive sanctions would not suffice to make most members of a community (that is all of them, leaving aside the outsiders, the marginal groups) strive for conformity. Only ambitious persons can be motivated by positive sanctions." (1985, 70-71) In saying this, she is not actually rejecting issue benefit as a motivating factor of opinion expression. Instead, what she is saying is that most people do not expect a significant amount of issue benefit enough to overwhelm the negative sanction of isolation. Meanwhile, the proportion of subjects who did not expected any kind (social or personal) of issue benefit was only 16% of total sample in this study.

The effect of opinion congruence, one of the central elements of spiral of silence theory, was found to be significant only when the type of opinion expression was a conspicuous one in which an individual's opinion expression was likely to be easily exposed to other people (TV interview) or to cause hostile responses from others (demonstration). It also was found that while subjects were sensitive to the opinions of their friends, they did not much care about the opinions of Michigan residents. This result suggests that the fear of isolation, which conceals a minority opinion, may come from intimate reference groups rather than from anonymous general public. Salmon and Kline (1985) have emphasized the role of small reference groups which are likely to exert greater influence than amorphous public over individuals' opinion expression.

In one sense, greater influence of reference groups can be understood in terms of the likelihood that opinion congruence can actually function as a source of procedural cost or reward. Olson (1965) has noted that it is much easier to impose selective incentive ("coercion" or "reward") in a small group than in a large one because individual behaviors are easily detected by other people in a small group. It is obvious that the responses from

reference groups are more frequent and immediate. That is, an individual's opinion expression is more likely to be detected by reference groups than by amorphous general public. Furthermore, if individuals expect a certain procedural reward - such as confirming collective identity - by remaining in the position of a particular group, it would be their reference groups rather than anonymous general public. The use of student sample, however, should not exclude the possibility that this study overestimated the influence of friends' opinions relative to its prevalence in general population.

The level of subjects' perception of their own issue knowledge was found to be influential on their opinion expressions. Therefore, issue knowledge can be regarded as a source of procedural cost (such as appearing ignorant) or reward (such as appearing politically efficacious) of opinion expression. Even though not hypothesized, it was found that the level of knowledge was influential on the willingness to engage in a TV interview and a discussion, but not associated with the willingness to participate in a demonstration. It is quite obvious that participating in a demonstration in general does not require a great amount of issue knowledge of its participants.

The present study attempted to explain individuals' opinion expressions through the framework of economic analysis, based on the assumption of rational human behavior. Opinion expression was assumed to be an outcome of individuals' rational calculus of benefits and costs arising from that social behavior. Meanwhile, Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence brought a perspective of structural determination in explaining individuals' political participation. For her, public opinion - opinion of the majority - is understood as a structural factor determining exclusively individuals' willingness to express opinions. In her theory, as Salmon and Glynn (1996) have noted, human beings are described as passive entities who conform to the social control of public opinion rather than active participants

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to the democratic process of political decision making. The concept of fear of isolation explains the process in which the structural coercion of public opinion comes to influence individuals' political participation. The present study, however, found that individuals' own judgment about the possible consequence of a given issue might function, against fear of isolation, as a motivating factor of opinion expression. This finding may suggest that when the members of a society come to realize a significant consequence of an issue to the extent they can overcome the coercion of unfavorable opinion climate, it will be the starting point of public opinion change.

As Barry (1970, 15) has noted, the framework of economic analysis of political participation "does not in itself provide anything more than a set of empty boxes waiting to be filled." Future research is needed to prove the possible sources of benefits and costs appropriate in various types of opinion expression, by replicating this study in diverse public issues and by using more representative samples.

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